

Sidewalk Zone Widths

The width of the sidewalk contributes to the degree of comfort and enjoyment of walking along a street. Narrow sidewalks do not support lively pedestrian activity, and may create dangerous conditions where people walk in the street. Typically, a five foot wide Pedestrian Zone supports two people walking side by side or two wheel chairs passing each other. An eight foot wide Pedestrian Zone allows two pairs of people to comfortably pass each other, and a ten foot or wider Pedestrian Zone can support high volumes of pedestrians.

Vibrant sidewalks bustling with pedestrian activity are not only used for transportation, but for social walking, lingering, and people watching. Sidewalks, especially along Downtown Commercial, Downtown Mixed-Use, and Neighborhood Main Streets, should encourage social uses of the sidewalk realm by providing adequate widths.

When determining sidewalk zone widths, factors to consider include the available right-of-way, anticipated pedestrian volumes, ridership projections for locations near transit, and the locations of bus shelters and transfer points.

Historically, a majority of sidewalks in Boston's neighborhoods were built to be 7' wide. Widening sidewalks by a few feet is often cost prohibitive and may require significant changes to drainage infrastructure as well as the relocation of utilities. While these guidelines prescribe more generous preferred sidewalk zone widths during street reconstruction projects, they also establish a total minimum sidewalk width of 7' for several Street Types.

If feasible to adjust curb locations, the widening of sidewalks may be achieved by narrowing and/or removing travel lanes or parking lanes, or establishing setbacks as a part of redevelopments. Where setbacks cannot be established or roadway space cannot be reallocated, consider converting the roadway to a Shared Street to increase pedestrian space and reduce vehicle speeds.

Appropriate sidewalk widths should be determined in consultation with the PWD and the Boston Transportation Department (BTD), and approved by the Public Improvement Commission (PIC).

When making decisions for how to allocate sidewalk space, the following principles should be used:

Frontage Zone

- ▶ The Frontage Zone should be maximized to provide space for cafés, plazas, and greenscape elements along building facades wherever possible, but not at the expense of reducing the Pedestrian Zone beyond the recommended minimum widths.

Pedestrian Zone

- ▶ The Pedestrian Zone should be clear of any obstructions including utilities, traffic control devices, trees, and furniture. When reconstructing sidewalks and relocating utilities, all utility access points and obstructions should be relocated outside of the Pedestrian Zone.
- ▶ While sidewalks do not need to be perfectly straight, the Pedestrian Zone should not weave back and forth in the right-of-way for no other reason than to introduce curves. Meandering sidewalks create navigational difficulties for pedestrians with vision impairments.
- ▶ In high volume, high density pedestrian areas, the Pedestrian Zone should be balanced with other Zones to accommodate large amounts of pedestrian traffic.

Greenscape/Furnishing Zone

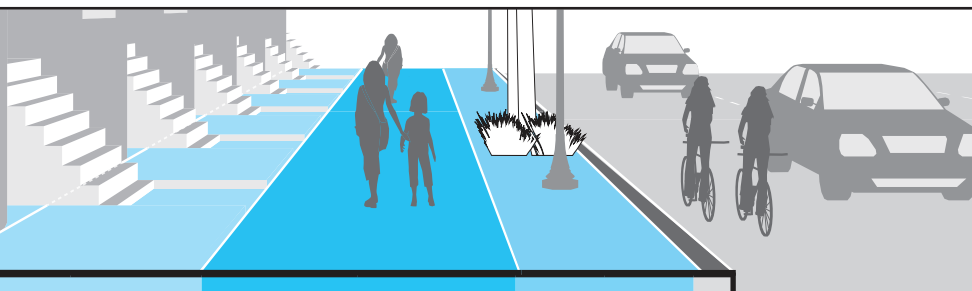
- ▶ Maximize the Greenscape/Furnishing Zone to provide as much of a buffer as possible between the Pedestrian Zone and adjacent street traffic; however do not reduce the Pedestrian Zone beyond the minimum recommended widths. When space is limited, parked cars and bicycle lanes can also serve as a buffer between the Pedestrian Zone and moving traffic.
- ▶ For new developments and where opportunities are available to create a consistent setback, designs should accommodate wider sidewalks with generous Greenscape/Furnishing Zones.
- ▶ On roadways without on-street parking and/or higher speeds, setbacks for vertical elements should be **greater than 18"** where feasible.
- ▶ Consider traffic calming elements, such as curb extensions or chicanes where on-street parking is present, to provide more space for street furniture, trees, and other amenities.

Curb Zone

- ▶ In the City of Boston all curbs are typically made of granite and are **6" wide with a 6" vertical reveal**.
- ▶ The Curb Zone should be free from all objects, furniture, sign posts, etc.

Preferred and Minimum Widths for Sidewalk Zones

The width and design of sidewalks will vary depending on street typology, functional classification, and demand. Below are the City of Boston's preferred and minimum widths for each Sidewalk Zone by Street Type.



Street Type	Frontage Zone		Pedestrian Zone*		Greenscape/ Furnishing Zone		Curb Zone	Total Width	
	Preferred	Minimum	Preferred	Minimum	Preferred	Minimum		Preferred	Minimum
Downtown Commercial	2'	0'	12'	8'	6'	1'-6"	6"	20'-6"	10'
Downtown Mixed-Use	2'	0'	10'	8'	6'	1'-6"	6"	18'-6"	10'
Neighborhood Main	2'	0'	8'	5'	6'	1'-6"	6"	16'-6"	7'
Neighborhood Connector	2'	0'	8'	5' (4')*	5'	1'-6"	6"	15'-6"	7'
Neighborhood Residential	2'	0'	5'	5' (4')*	4'	1'-6"	6"	11'-6"	7'
Industrial Street	2'	0'	5'	5' (4')*	4'	1'-6"	6"	11'-6"	7'
Shared Street	2'	0'	Varies	5' (4')*	N/A	N/A	N/A	Varies	Varies
Parkway	N/A	N/A	6'	5'	10'	5'	6"	16'-6"	10'-6"
Boulevard	2'	0'	6'	5'	10'	5'	6"	18'-6"	11'-6"

Notes

* 5' is the preferred minimum width of the Pedestrian Zone in the City of Boston. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) minimum 4' wide Pedestrian Zone can be applied using engineering judgement when retrofitting 7' wide existing sidewalks where widening is not feasible.

Frontage Zone

- Where buildings are located against the back of the sidewalk and constrained situations do not provide width for the Frontage Zone, the effective width of the Pedestrian Zone is reduced by 1', as pedestrians will shy from the building edge.
- The preferred width of the Frontage Zone to accommodate sidewalk cafés is 6'.

Pedestrian Zone

- Based on engineering judgment in consultation with PWD and the Mayor's Commission for Person's with Disabilities, the ADA minimum 4' Pedestrian Zone (plus 5' of width every 200') may be applied.

Greenscape/Furnishing Zone

- The minimum width of the Greenscape/Furnishing Zone necessary to support standard street tree installation is 2'-6".
- Utilities, street trees, and other sidewalk furnishings should be set back from curb face a minimum of 18".

Curb Zone

- Although the typical width of the Curb Zone is 6", widths may vary; additional width beyond 6" should be calculated as a part of the Greenscape/Furnishing Zone.



Sidewalks by Boston's Street Types

The character of sidewalks can vary widely depending upon the neighborhood context and Street Type. The four zones of the sidewalk — the Frontage, Pedestrian, Greenscape/Furnishing, and Curb Zones — assume different purposes and varying degrees of prominence in each Street Type.

Boston seeks to optimize its streets and sidewalks while respecting the historic fabric of the city. In many places, narrow streets and sidewalks are integral to a neighborhood's identity. In previous generations, buildings were often demolished to make space for wider roads and the modern highway and street network. Boston was one of the first American cities to begin the reversal of this trend, and in the early 1970s made history by converting land and funding intended for a limited access highway into a public transit corridor with bicycle and pedestrian accommodations, greenways, and open spaces.

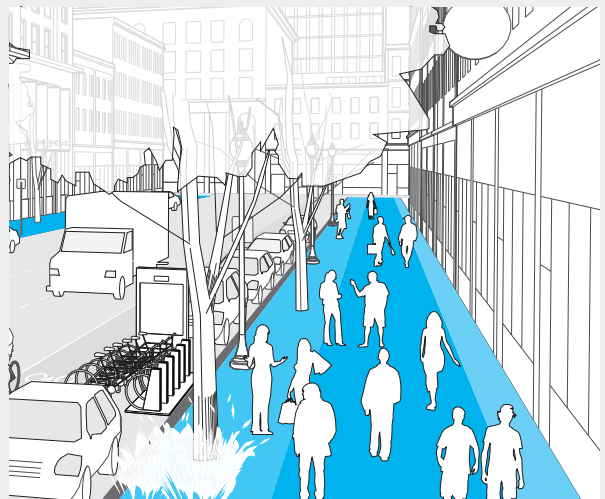
On Street Types with higher speed roadways, the buffer between the Pedestrian Zone and the adjacent motor vehicle traffic is important in order to encourage walking; the degree of separation from motor vehicles determines comfort and safety for pedestrians. The Greenscape/Furnishing Zone, as well as parked cars and bicycle lanes, can help improve comfort and safety for pedestrians.

The following section provides a discussion of sidewalk design considerations for each of Boston's new Street Types:

- ▶ Downtown Commercial Street
- ▶ Downtown Mixed-Use Street
- ▶ Neighborhood Main Street
- ▶ Neighborhood Connector Street
- ▶ Neighborhood Residential Street
- ▶ Industrial Street
- ▶ Shared Street
- ▶ Parkway
- ▶ Boulevard

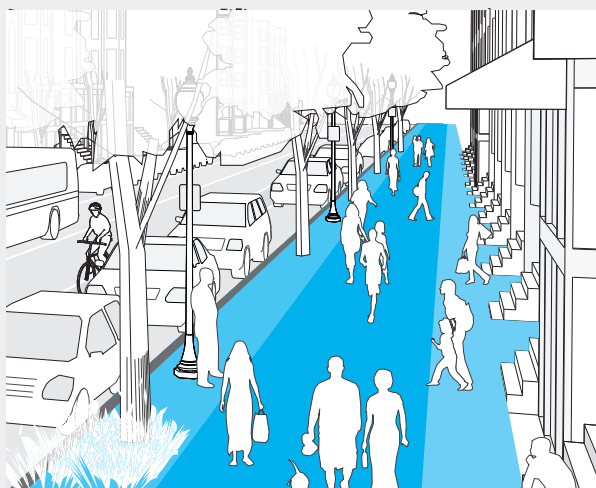
Downtown Commercial

Wide Pedestrian Zones dominate Downtown Commercial streets and accommodate high volumes of pedestrian traffic. Continuous building facades provide visual interest at ground-level, with the Frontage Zone announcing building entrances and the occasional café. The Greenscape/Furnishing Zone is characterized by planters and high-quality finishes as are prominent along Federal and Boylston Streets. Street furniture, public art, and wayfinding are featured in the Greenscape/Furnishing Zone.



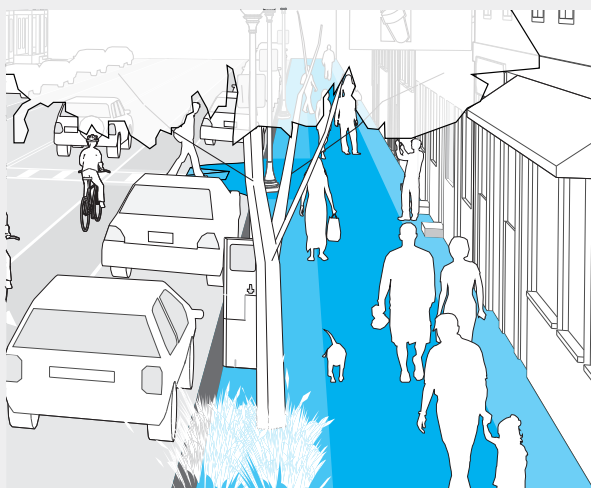
Downtown Mixed-Use

High pedestrian volumes and a wide Pedestrian Zone take center stage on Downtown Mixed-Use Streets. Use of the Frontage Zone varies based on land use, such as chairs and tables at cafés, planted areas at residential entrances, and sidewalk retail spilling out of stores. Typically the Greenscape/Furnishing Zone is narrow and functional. The layered and ever-changing Frontage Zone makes the sidewalks of Downtown Mixed-Use Streets stimulating places that encourage pedestrians to linger and interact. Newbury Street in Back Bay and Tremont Street in the South End exemplify the character of this Street Type.



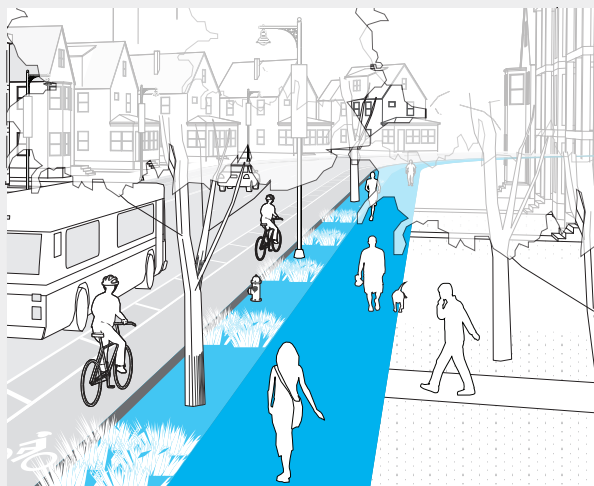
Neighborhood Main Street

Similar to Downtown Mixed-Use streets, these streets are also characterized by high volumes of pedestrian activity and a mix of uses along the sidewalk. The overall scale though is smaller than Downtown Streets, with typically narrower sidewalks such as those on Dorchester Avenue in Dorchester and along Centre and South Streets in Jamaica Plain. The focus is on providing access to the many entrances of small businesses lining the street. The Greenscape/Furnishing Zone should be as generous as possible and flexible in order to accommodate holiday events, farmers' markets, street fairs, and other community gatherings.



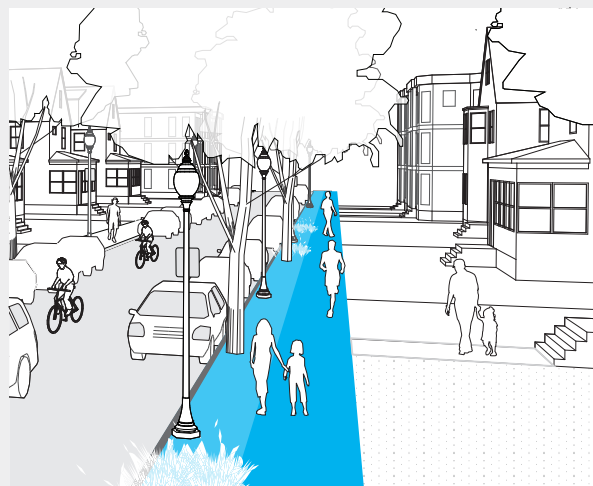
Neighborhood Connector

Neighborhood Connectors balance the needs of people passing through with those who live and work along the street. Regularly spaced trees and lighting in the Greenscape/Furnishing Zone provide unifying elements on long streets connecting neighborhoods such as Hyde Park Avenue. This type of street can have a relatively high volume of pedestrians and often includes transit routes. The Greenscape/Furnishing Zone is a critical buffer between pedestrians and high volume traffic, and can also provide opportunities for stormwater treatment and air pollution mitigation, especially with new tree plantings.



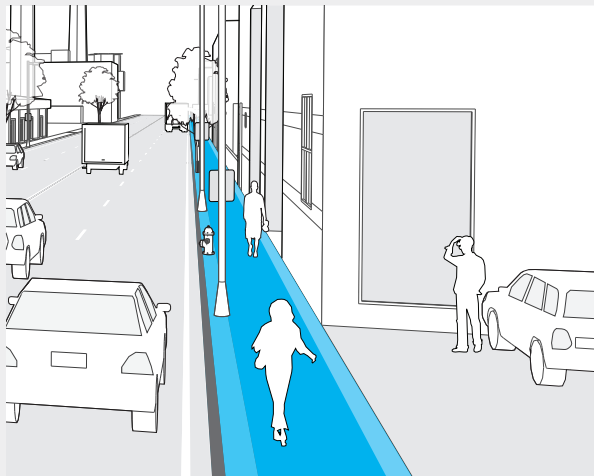
Neighborhood Residential

Neighborhood Residential Streets typically have narrow widths, slower speeds, on-street parking, and a less populated sidewalk environment. The Greenscape/Furnishing Zone can accommodate street trees, utilities, and sign posts, and a clear and unobstructed Pedestrian Zone should be provided. Stormwater practices can be small, such as green gutters, or more extensive depending on the nature of the street. Visual interest is provided by architectural detail and greenscape elements on adjacent private property.



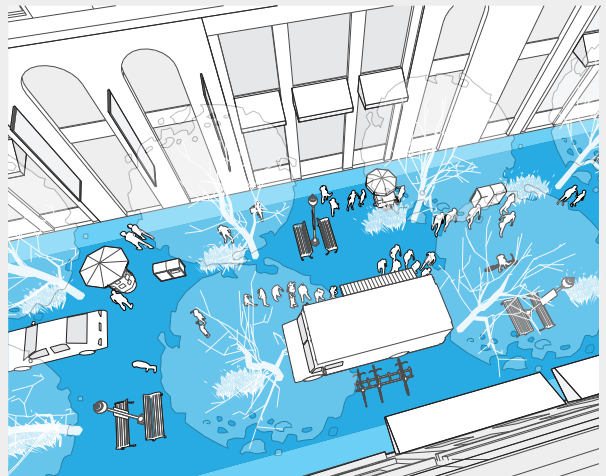
Industrial

The sidewalks in industrial districts should be utilitarian and uncluttered. Street furniture is mainly limited to street lighting and other essential elements. There may be significant opportunities to incorporate stormwater management strategies along the sidewalks. Street trees and plantings can help mitigate pollutants in the air and water via phytoremediation, as well as provide a buffer to traffic. Bollards are useful for protecting pedestrians where turning vehicles can pose a hazard. Loading docks and driveways that cross the sidewalk should be clearly delineated for pedestrian safety.



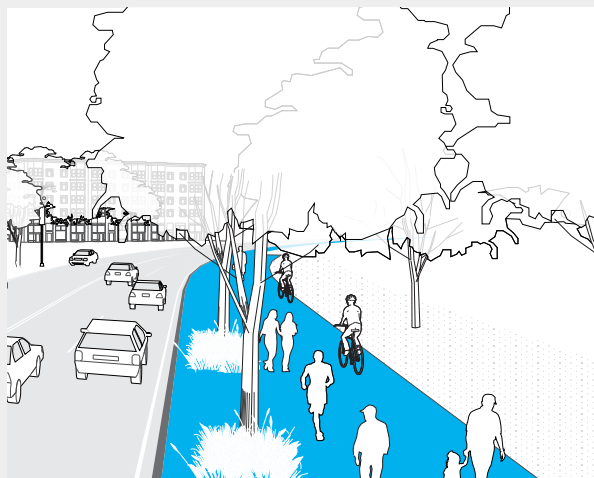
Shared Streets

Shared Streets are curbless, and the distinction between the zones of the sidewalk, as well as the sidewalk and roadway itself, are blurred. Cross Street in the North End is a recently constructed example. Frontage Zone uses such as cafés can extend from the building face towards the middle of the street and be framed by planters and railings. The creative design of street furniture, greenscape, and lighting can help channelize, direct, and slow vehicles by creating chicanes, parking, and loading zones. While the width of the Pedestrian Zone can vary along a Shared Street, there must be a continuous accessible path along the entire length of the roadway. Bollards are often used to protect the accessible pedestrian path, and subtle changes in materials can be used to differentiate zones.



Parkways

Parkways in Boston typically run adjacent to open spaces and provide travel for bicyclists and pedestrians often on shared-use paths like those along the Emerald Necklace. A generous Greenscape/Furnishing Zone provides a buffer between the Pedestrian Zone and higher speed motor vehicle traffic, and accommodates trees and opportunities for stormwater management elements. Street furniture should generally be located within the park rather than in the Greenscape/Furnishing Zone due to higher motor vehicle speeds. On Parkways with bicycle routes or high volumes of bicyclists, designs should accommodate separate pedestrian and bicycle facilities; however, where space is constrained, designs should follow shared-use path guidelines.



Boulevards

Boulevards such as Commonwealth Avenue are similar to Parkways in scale, but are characterized by a strong building edge and continuous rows of trees. The Greenscape/Furnishing Zone is generally larger than the Pedestrian Zone to provide a buffer from higher-speed traffic. Strolling is popular on Boulevards, and the Pedestrian Zone should be wide enough to accommodate groups of people passing each. Stormwater management systems can incorporate large trees as well as low growing vegetation. Street furniture should be formal and belong to a single style family to create a unified landscape.

